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UNCLAS BOGOTA 002798

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SNAR](#) [CO](#)

SUBJECT: NAS PROGRAMS IN ACTION: COLOMBIAN ELECTIONS SUPPORT

1. (U) In support of Colombian Congressional elections held on March 12, NAS-supported aircraft dispersed throughout the country beginning on March 10 to provide quick reaction capability and general lift to national security forces. Overall, the security situation was calm, but in Larandia, Saravena, Narino, and Popayan, Quick Reaction Forces (QRFs) launched to provide assistance and visible support to the elections process.

2. (U) Plan Colombia Helicopter Program (PCHP) helos on standby in Larandia had a significant engagement with enemy forces in the vicinity of Montenito, 15 miles south of Larandia. The QRF went to ground, and one Colombian from the 2nd Counternarcotics Battalion was wounded in action. One of the helos received four impacts. PCHP helos in Saravena also responded to a request for combat air support from a unit receiving hostile fire in an urban area. Enemy combatants were chased out into the fields and engaged; there was no battle damage.

3. (U) Forty miles south of Popayan late in the afternoon of election day, March 12, the ELN attacked 13 brand new Colombian National Police (CNP) Auxiliaries providing election security. The Auxiliaries were watching the town from a nearby hilltop when the ELN attacked from a neighboring hilltop. The Popayan QRF launched with two CNP Black Hawks and 27 Junglas to insert the Jungla troops on the ground in the vicinity just before nightfall. After four hours of overland movement, evading the attacking ELN, the Junglas linked up with the Auxiliaries and brought them to safety. The Auxiliaries were equipped with INL-funded (under the Reestablishment of Police Presence in Conflictive Zones program) arms that allowed them to delay a full ELN assault on their position until the Jungla relief force arrived. There were no casualties.

4. (U) In an operation on Monday morning March 13, one of the NAS-supported Black Hawks in the CNP Aviation Program (ARAVI) rescued a Colombian Army soldier who had stepped on a land mine, blowing his leg off, some forty miles west of Popayan. The ARAVI program has equipped five of the seven CNP Black Hawks with search-and-rescue hoists, which in this instance permitted a CNP airman to descend approximately 120 feet into the trees and pull the soldier into the hovering aircraft. With no landing zone in sight in the steep and heavily wooded mountains, the hoist equipment probably saved the soldier's life. A Jungla graduate of a NAS-sponsored 18-week medical course provided first aid en route to the Popayan Medical Center.

5. (U) PCHP and CNP helos and fixed wing aircraft provided invaluable lift support to national security forces. ARAVI utilized approximately 270 hours of air support in 185 lift missions, at a cost of approximately 390,000 USD. PCHP utilized 240 hours of blade time, ferrying 400 passengers, at an approximate cost of 350,000 USD.

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